

Meditations: Easter Saturday

Some reflections that can assist our prayer on Easter Saturday.

- Jesus calls everyone to be an apostle
- God counts on our strengths and on our weaknesses
- Finding strength in the Risen Christ

THE FIRST APPARITION of the Risen Lord was to Mary Magdalen, the evangelist Mark tells us. Jesus later joined two disciples on their way to Emmaus, and then appeared to the eleven apostles (cf. *Mk* 16:9-15). In all

these appearances, Jesus wanted to restore their peace of mind, stir up their faith and enkindle the apostolic mission to which they were called. It is true that, when the Master needed them most, his disciples had given in to cowardice. Even after the resurrection, they continued to be bewildered and filled with doubts. When Christ appeared to the eleven, *he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen (Mk 16:14).*

In spite of everything, Jesus did not hesitate to confirm them in their vocation. They had been chosen to be his witnesses, and he didn't want to replace them with others. That visit ends with this divine mission: *Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation (Mk 16:15).* The gift of being called to Jesus' apostolic mission belongs to them, even though they are not particularly

strong, nor especially ready to carry it out. So it is easy to understand the crowd's surprise when, a few weeks later, Peter and John cure a paralytic: *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they wondered (Acts 4:13).*

The apostles, with their gifts and with their defects, were to be “fishers of men” sent out to all the world’s seas. Thus it would be clear to everyone that salvation is the work of God. “Every man and woman *is* a mission; that is the reason for our life on this earth ... The fact that we are not in this world by our own choice makes us sense that there is an initiative that precedes us and makes us exist. Each one of us is called to reflect on this fact: ‘I *am* a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world’ (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 273).”^[1]

SAINT PAUL understood very well what it means to be an apostle of Christ: *I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong* (2 Cor 12:9-10). As Christ's disciples, our own weakness is a source of strength for us, since when we find ourselves destitute of any resources of our own, we discover that we possess the greatest gift of all: God who gives himself to us entirely. Hence the apostle to the Gentiles "does not boast of his achievements, his strength or his activities and successes, but rather of what God has worked in and through him."^[2] The evangelization carried out by the Church is Christ's and not ours. Like Saint Paul, we sense we are *earthen vessels* (2 Cor 4:7) which God fills

with the treasure of his unmerited grace.

The Kingdom of God does not come about thanks merely to effective human strategies, nor does it depend only on our ability to face new challenges. Although all these may, indeed, be part of our collaboration, nonetheless it is in God that we find the strength and knowledge needed for our mission. Our Lord wants to count on us to extend his Kingdom, a reality that should amaze us.

“Therefore, to the extent that our union with the Lord increases and our prayer intensifies, we also go to the essentials and understand that it is not the power of our own means, our virtues, our skills, that brings about the Kingdom of God, but that it is God who works miracles precisely through our weakness, our inadequacy for the task.”^[3]

GO INTO ALL THE WORLD and preach the gospel (Mk 16:15). This is the Master's "imperative command." They were gathered together in the same house, perhaps around the same table, where Jesus had given them his flesh to eat and his blood to drink. The apostles didn't try to justify themselves before the Risen Lord for their lack of loyalty and courage. Neither did they try to excuse themselves from carrying it out, even though they must have thought the mission was too much for them. What must their reaction have been to these words of Jesus? Their heads must have been spinning on hearing such a challenging message: Are we really going to reach the whole world? When we couldn't even stand up and face the people here?

If they were counting only on themselves, such a great mission could have seemed utopian to them.

But seeing the Risen Christ looking at them intently, with his wounded palms and side, their whole perspective changes. If Jesus wants them to travel to the furthest corners of the world, they will do so in his name. To carry out Jesus' mission Saint Josemaría urged us: "Get to know Christ; make him known; take him everywhere."^[4] "Evangelization always begins with an encounter with the Lord Jesus. Those who come to Jesus and have experienced his love, immediately want to share the beauty of the meeting and the joy born of his friendship ... Dear young people, allow yourselves to be led on by the power of God's love. Let that love overcome the tendency to remain enclosed in your own world. Have the courage to 'go out' from yourselves in order to 'go forth' towards others and show them the way to an encounter with God."^[5] Our own experience of our Lord's love is the starting point for

attracting others to Him: *for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard* (Acts 4:20).

In carrying out this mission we find that our own faith is strengthened. We can be sure that making Jesus known to our friends is the most precious gift we can give them. Mary, as a good mother, encourages us to give the best of ourselves to others, with the help of God's grace.

^[1] Francis, Message, 20 May 2018.

^[2] Benedict XVI, Audience, 13 June 2012.

^[3] Ibid.

^[4] Saint Josemaría, cited in Pedro Casciaro, *Dream and your dreams will fall short*, Scepter, London-New York, 2008, p. 36.

^[5] Benedict XVI, Message for WYD, 18 October 2012.

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